Choosing to learn outside the classroom: Rural South African students' motivation for and benefits of participating in voluntary international virtual exchanges

Diana Breshears
ORCID: 0000-0003-3236-7766

Department of Communication Science, University of the Free State, Phuthaditjhaba, South Africa

BreshearsD@ufs.ac.za

Rentia du Plessis
ORCID: 0009-0002-7541-9570

Department of Communication Science, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

DuPlessisE5@ufs.ac.za

ABSTRACT

In recent years, universities have adopted virtual exchange programmes to promote intercultural competencies, language acquisition, and global citizenship among students. Virtual exchange is praised as a way to provide international experiences to students who do not have the means to study abroad. Current literature on virtual exchange programmes largely focuses on Western experiences, with little attention to the developing countries that participate in these programmes. The purpose of this study is to explore rural South African students' motivations for participation and perceptions of their experiences in their virtual exchange with a midwestern university in the United States of America (USA). 47 students at the University of the Free State's (UFS) Qwaqwa campus took part in four virtual online connections over the course of two months. Unlike most virtual exchange programmes represented in extant research, students participated in the programme voluntarily rather than as part of their prescriptive coursework. Through a focus group interview with 16 of the students at the conclusion of the interactions, we explored their motivations for taking part in the programme, as well as their perceived benefits of participation. Students were overwhelmingly positive about their experience and identified three types of advantages for participation: building relationships, building knowledge, and professional development.

Introduction

There is no denying the globalization of our world and the increasing diversification of national and international workplaces. As educators become aware of the interconnectedness of the modern workplace, we acknowledge the importance of shaping our students into competent global citizens (Abrahamse, Johnson, Levinson, Medsker, Pearce, Quiroga, & Scipione, 2014). We also acknowledge the difficulty of imparting global competency in a traditional classroom where students are not exposed to real-world application of intercultural theories. Influenced by the theory of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), many educators have turned to Study Abroad programmes in which students spend extended periods of time in a foreign country and are immersed in a different culture to provide this real-world experience (e.g., Boateng & Thompson, 2013; Levine & Garland, 2015; Earnest, Rosenbusch, Wallace-Williams, & Keim, 2016; Wilson, Brain, Brown, Gaind, Radan, & Redmond, 2016). Studying abroad is considered a good example of experiential learning because students learn about cultural differences and similarities and build intercultural competencies through hands-on experience with different cultures (Levine & Garland, 2015).

Decades of research show that studying abroad greatly benefits university students' intercultural communication competence (Belz, 2005; Abrahamse et al., 2014; Brooks & Pitts, 2016; O'Dowd & Dooly, 2020), as well as aiding second language acquisition/mastery (Belz, 2005). Despite these benefits, few students can participate in these programmes (Chia, Poe, & Singh, 2008; Abrahamse et al, 2014). This is particularly true for university students in developing countries, as the costs of these programmes are high and funding is limited (Rossini, Rincón, & Rutkowski, 2015). Garcés and O'Dowd (2021) rightly claim that the lack of physical mobility for many students makes studying abroad an elitist activity. This seems to be the case for South African university students. Of the 412,207 sub-Saharan African students who studied abroad in 2020, only about 12,295 were from South Africa (United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2022). This is less than two percent of all university students in South Africa (Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2022).

For many years, internationalization was equated with student and staff mobility (Beelen & Jones, 2015). In 2001, however, the concept of Internationalization at Home (IaH) was introduced to challenge the notion that internationalization only happens when people travel to other countries (Crowther, Joris, Otten, Nilsson, Teekens, & Wächter, 2001). IaH is defined as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for

all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015: 69). One method of IaH that is gaining popularity in South Africa and other parts of the world is by creating virtual exchange programmes (Chia et al., 2008). While students from developing countries have been excluded from the intercultural experiences provided by studying abroad, virtual exchange programmes have been adopted as an alternative by many institutions (Chia et al., 2008). Virtual exchange is a pedagogical approach where students engage in online, intercultural interaction (O'Dowd, 2019). Virtual exchange is one way to include and learn from members of cultures that might otherwise have remained excluded (Belz, 2005; Lewental & Kress, 2005). Though not as immersive, it is the next best thing to actual travel abroad.

Similar to study abroad initiatives, virtual exchange has been shown to benefit language acquisition and intercultural competence development (O'Dowd & Dooly, 2020), but does so in a way that is cost effective, more feasible, and safe (Chia et al., 2008). Specifically, virtual exchange provides students with better understanding of and more positive attitudes of people from other cultures (Chia et al., 2008; Chia, Poe, & Wuensch, 2009; Karpova, Correia, & Baran, 2009). Research also shows that virtual exchange initiatives can assist students in developing digital competence, problem-solving, and other soft skills used in the global workplace (Karpova et al., 2009; O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016; O'Dowd, 2019; Garcés & O'Dowd, 2021). Overall, scholars have argued that virtual exchange is an innovative way to bring experiential learning and IaH to students with few or no mobility opportunities (Nava-Aguirre, Garcia-Portillo, & Lopez-Morales, 2019; Wood, Collins, Mueller, Stetten, & El-Shokry, 2022).

Researchers have been exploring the ins and outs of virtual exchange programmes since the 1990s, but little is known about the experiences of students in developing countries who take part in these exchanges. Extant literature largely focuses on virtual exchange between developed countries, particularly Western and developed Asian countries (Belz, 2005; Carney, 2006; Karpova et al., 2009; Brooks & Pitts, 2016; Cunningham, 2019; Lee & Song, 2019). The present study is designed to begin to give voice to African students by exploring the experiences of rural South African students who participated in voluntary, intercultural virtual exchanges. This research was guided by the following research question:

RQ: What are South African students' motivations for and their perceived benefits of taking part in a virtual intercultural exchange programme?

Methodology

This study reports on a pilot virtual exchange programme created by the Communication Science department at the UFS's Qwaqwa campus, in partnership with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's (UNL) Global Virtual Project. UFS Qwaqwa is situated in the rural Eastern Free State in South Africa and services rural students from Qwaqwa and surrounding provinces. UNL's transnational collaborative learning programme has been running for 14 years as part of their Intercultural Communication module (Braithwaite, 2017). In the UNL context these interactions are part of the students' curriculum and students are assessed based on their presentations and other tests or assignments. However, unlike most virtual exchange programmes, the UFS students participated in the programme voluntarily as a "club" rather than as part of their prescribed coursework. All students in UFS's Intercultural Communication module on the Qwaqwa campus between 2018 and 2019 were invited to join. Of the approximately 200 students invited, 29 students took part in four online interactions with American students over the course of two months. Ten students participated in one of the sessions, seven students participated in two sessions, eight students participated in three sessions, and four students participated in all four of the sessions. During these interactions, students from both countries shared information about their cultural practices, societal experiences, and college life in their respective countries.

At the conclusion of the online interactions for the year, the South African students were recruited via volunteer sampling to take part in a focus group interview about their experiences, both positive and negative, with the virtual exchange. Of the 29 students who took part in the Global Classroom Club, 16 volunteered to participate in the focus group interview, which lasted 45 minutes. Data were transcribed verbatim and thematic analysis was performed. Of the 16 participants, all but one were female and their ages ranged from 19 - 27 years (average = 20.9 years). Nine of the participants were second-year university students, five were first-year university students, and two did not indicate their year of study. All participants were Black South Africans.

Once transcribed, data were analysed using qualitative data analysis software by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps to thematic analysis:

> Step 1 - Familiarizing oneself with the data by engaging in a thorough read of the transcript.
> Step 2 - Generating initial codes by labelling anything that was related to the research question.
> Step 3 - Looking for relationships between the codes to produce initial themes.
> Step 4 - Reviewing themes to determine/refine the fit of the codes within the themes and of the themes to the phenomenon at hand.

Step 5 - Providing a narrative description of and naming each theme.
Step 6 - Writing up the description of the findings and providing relevant exemplars to the themes from the data.

Steps 1 - 3 were completed individually by each author and steps 4 - 6 were performed collaboratively. The initial steps of analysis were performed individually to allow for more emerging themes and interpretation of data. The final analysis steps were collaborative to provide rigour to the refinement of themes/findings. In the end, there was little variation in the authors' initial coding, indicating that the emergent themes were true to participants' experiences and likely not the result of researcher bias. In addition to the rigour of analysis methods, trustworthiness of findings is further supported by rich descriptions, iterative questioning, and inclusion of participant exemplars (Shenton, 2004).

Results

Students were asked to discuss separately their motivation for participation in the virtual exchange and the benefits from participating, but many of the themes overlapped and students discussed motivation and benefits concurrently (See Table 1). The fact that the motivations and benefits overlap suggest that the programme met the students' expectations. As a result of this overlap, we discuss these themes together.

	Motivation to Participate	Benefits of Participation
Relationship Building- With Americans	✓	✓
Relationship Building- With Qwaqwa Students	✓	✓
Knowledge Building– Learning	✓	✓
Knowledge Building– Myth-testing		✓
Professional Development – CV Building	✓	✓
Professional Development – Communication Skills		✓

Table 1. Breakdown of categories and themes

Three broad themes emerged from the data analysis as motivations for and benefits of participating in the virtual exchange with the American students: Relationship Building, Knowledge Building, and Professional Development. Within each of these broader themes, two sub-themes emerged.

Theme 1: Relationship building with Americans

Building relationships/friendships with Americans was reported both as a motivation to join the virtual exchange club, as well as a benefit of having joined. Students liked the idea of acquainting themselves with someone overseas and possibly establishing friendships with foreign students. One participant explained:

> *For the fact that it was global, I wanted to join the group. I wanted to make a friend that's overseas. After I do my honours, I really want to do my master's overseas. I made a friend on Instagram [from the class].*

Another participant similarly explained:

> *Now we have friends in different time zones [laughter] …. At least now, somebody knows me that isn't my family or my friends or my colleagues. It was a very lovely experience.*

Students on this rural South African campus do not get many opportunities to interact with foreigners, so this was an aspect of the virtual exchange that attracted students and was one that they enjoyed.

Theme 2: Relationship building with peers

An emerging theme that had not been anticipated was the desire for, and appreciation of, the interaction that students had with their fellow South African students. This was another theme that emerged both in the discussion of what motivated the students to join and of what they considered as a benefit of having taken part in the club. One student expressed her appreciation of the opportunity to interact with students on campus who were in different years of study:

> *Interacting with people that were not part of my class. I didn't even know who we were going to be talking to, but the fact that, at least we were going to be interacting with the first- years.*

Another student discussed the benefit of interacting with local students:

> *Interacting with other people. At least now I know I can – with him, her [pointing to classmates], they were never people I thought I'd wave at on campus, because they didn't exist. Yes, we were in the same class, but they didn't exist. So at least now it brought a sense of people are actually alive around you. So, you see people and you say*

hello. That's how we end up having all these connections. Like, what if I need him next time, and he didn't exist to me? So it's teaching us how to get along with other people.

The virtual exchange sessions not only allowed students to learn about the American students, but also to learn about the students in their modules with whom they rarely interact outside of the classroom.

Theme 3: Knowledge building – mutual Learning

Students reported learning about another culture as the biggest motivation to participate in the virtual exchange, as well as the greatest benefit they received from participating. One student explained:

Their culture is different from ours, but I feel like at least we get a bit of that – at least we have a better understanding of who they are as opposed to who we are. I kinda like the fact that we had that platform to kind of break that.

Another student echoed this desire to learn about the differences between the cultures:

I just wanted to interact with them because I noticed that most of their communication is not the same with us. They won't have the same meaning as we have as black people, as South Africans. I just wanted to learn those things.

Beyond the student learning about the US American culture and how it differs from that of South Africa, students also expressed appreciation for being able to share their own culture with others. One student stated:

Well, I was comfortable with the fact that we shared more because at least now they know we don't live in a jungle [laughter]. I was just excited about them understanding that no, we are not this big jungle. We have different people, and this is what they do.

Another student explained that, while the American students had to participate as part of their module, they felt that they were genuinely interested in learning about the South Africans:

I feel the two classes have people who are eager to learn. Yes, for them, it was something that they had to do, but they still showed interest. Because sometimes, if you have to just get through an assignment, you just do it and get it over and done with. If we were presenting and they didn't care, they wouldn't have asked. It shows that 'ok, we want to learn.'

Overall, students overwhelmingly participated in the virtual classroom to learn about another culture and were pleasantly surprised by the interest that American students had in their culture as well.

Theme 4: Knowledge building - myth-testing

One theme that emerged as an unexpected benefit of the virtual exchange (i.e., it was not listed as a motivation to participate, but was discussed as a benefit of having participated) was the opportunity to test and even dispel pre-existing myths that the two groups had (or may have had) about each other. Some students discussed how the American students did not fit the stereotypes they had held about Americans. One student explained:

> *Even the way we carried ourselves was very much alike. There wasn't any unruliness that we've seen in movies. I watched 'Sister Act' and I was expecting people to just start shoving desks around, and it's not happening. Why is 'Sister Act' doing this to me?*

Similarly, another student shared:

> *They are more human than I thought they would be like. When I think about Americans, I think about people who don't care about school. They only care about being famous and all of that. But then I realized that they are more focused on their academics more than the lifestyle of being famous and all of that.*

Students overwhelmingly expressed the change in misperceptions that they previously held about US Americans. The session also challenged the preconceived views that they assumed US Americans had about South Africans. This was evident in the following exchange:

> *Student: I thought they were going to look down on us [Class in agreement].*
> *Researcher: Why?*
> *Student: Because they're Americans! That is the perception that we are given from the internet, magazines, and television, that these are the type of people they are. I think we all went in thinking that we're going to be talking to those people.*
> *Researcher: So then were your perceptions accurate?*
> *Entire Group in Agreement: NO.*
> *Student: Zero.*

Students expressed feelings of acceptance by the American students. As one student explained:

> *It showed that if, one day, one of us would want to go over to America, I think we'd know that no one would treat us differently. There wouldn't be any apartheid or anything. We would just be normal; just another person.*

Theme 5: Professional development – communication skills

A theme that emerged as a benefit of participation but was not reported as a motivator to participate in the first place, was the communication skills arising from the virtual interactions throughout the semester. This finding had less to do with interacting specifically with American

26

students, but more to do with the opportunity to make presentations in front of groups of people. One student explained:

> *I think I can benefit more when it comes to presentations. We'll be more aware of how to present in front of people. We have more communication skills.*

Similarly, another student shared:

> *I think, like she said, with public speaking and being able to present better. Going into second, third, fourth year, we're going to be expected to do a lot of public speaking, so this can help us. With those who struggle with public speaking and communicating better, I think it will help us.*

Because the virtual exchange club was not formally integrated into a module, the presentations were opportunities for students to practise speaking in public without being graded on their performance.

Theme 6: Professional development – building Curriculum Vitae (CV)

When asked about their motivation for participating in the virtual exchange club, many students discussed the importance of the certificate of participation that they were promised at the end of the semester. They felt that the addition of the certificate to their CV would make them stand out to potential employers. One student explained:

> *Some of us, in our holidays in December, we could get part time jobs in call centres for Vodacom, Cell C, any of those places, if we have our certificate with our communication skills.*

Another student echoed:

> *I wanted it to be on my profile. It's a communication skill which will make me more credible for particular jobs and stuff.*

Overall, students strongly believe that the virtual exchanges make them more marketable to potential employers and/or open them to new job opportunities.

Theme 7: Voluntary participation

There was one theme that emerged from the focus group data that was not related to the motivations and benefits of taking part in the virtual exchange club but was important to the students' experience. When discussing the exchange programme as a whole, students overwhelmingly expressed the desire to keep it as a voluntary club rather than making it part of a

formal curriculum of any module. Students explained the importance of not being assessed for these interactions, but rather being able to participate for enjoyment. One student explained:

> *I feel like the learning experience is amazing because nobody forced us to do it. If it becomes compulsory, it's just one of those things that we want to do and get over it. But am I really getting anything out of it? I feel like they should do it at free will. That way— It's very easy to link what it is that you got from the global classroom to what you get in the actual classroom. If they do come because it's an invite, they'll still be able to put whatever it is down on paper, unlike if it's mandatory.*

Similarly, another student shared:

> *I think it goes back to what she said. It's going to start now becoming a thing of, ugh, let me just go to class because I have to go to class. And not, oh I'm going to the global classroom to interact with students from another country. It wouldn't be fun [if it is compulsory].*

Discussion

Virtual exchange is well-established as a valuable tool in language classrooms for the dual purpose of language acquisition and building intercultural competence. It is also a valuable resource for students who study intercultural communication in Communication Science modules. While some programmes have been established in the USA, little focus has been given to the benefits of these programmes to intercultural communication students in non-Western countries. Even when non-Western students participate in the exchange, it is usually the Western partners' perspectives that are recorded in scholarship. The current study offers insight into the experiences of virtual exchange from the perspectives of students from a developing country.

Overall, the South African students reported an overwhelmingly positive experience of participating in the voluntary virtual exchange with American university students. In fact, they benefited more than we or they expected, reporting more benefits of having participated than motivations that brought them to the club in the first place. Studies have shown that virtual exchange increases students' knowledge of the other cultures (Fedderholdt, 2001; Torii-Williams, 2004) and this was no different for our students. Students reported learning about US American culture, the enjoyment of teaching US Americans about rural South African culture and being able to test (and often break) preconceived cultural stereotypes. Experiential learning offers a foundation for lifelong learning (Kolb, 1984) and this was present in students' desire for continued contact with the UNL students at the conclusion of the exchange partnership. The friendships formed during these exchanges may lead to ongoing intercultural experiences in the students' personal lives.

Departing from international findings, the South African students did not report language acquisition and/or practice as a motivation for or benefit of participation, but instead viewed the experience as a chance to practice communication adaptation with people from another culture and to build their confidence in cross-cultural interactions. This difference is likely the result of this study's placement in the field of Communication Science rather than in Foreign Language Education, where most of the virtual exchange scholarship resides. That said, it was surprising that the students did not discuss language acquisition as a benefit, as for most of them English is a third or fourth language, and our students often struggle with English as the mode of teaching at our university.

The importance students placed on professional development as a motivation for and benefit of participating in virtual exchange is an important contribution of this study. Little scholarly attention has been given to the role virtual exchange programmes can have on the professional development of university students. In one of the few studies where personal development features, Rossini et al. (2015) showed that Peruvian students were more interested in acquiring international competencies from the virtual exchange experience than were their Dutch counterparts. It is possible that non-Western students place more importance on professional development. Future research should focus on this phenomenon within virtual exchange programmes, particularly for the professional benefits they may provide to universities in rural and/or developing countries. There have been claims that virtual exchanges can prepare students for an internationalized workforce (Brooks & Pitts, 2016; O'Dowd, 2018), but more focused attention is needed in this scholarship.

Most of the published literature explores virtual exchange programmes that are integrated into classroom curricula and many researchers include this as part of their definition of "virtual exchange" (O'Dowd, 2018). Researchers have even warned of the dangers of not integrating virtual exchange into a formal curriculum (Lewis & O'Dowd, 2016). The students in the current study, however, expressed that the voluntary nature of the club was preferable. Students were more comfortable and able to be themselves. It is possible that the interactions were more authentic because they were not being graded on a performance. It is also possible that intrinsic (versus extrinsic) motivation is at play here and that the students are expressing a preference for educational experiences that they are motivated to take part in out of a genuine interest (Pfingsthorn, Kramer, Czura, & Stefl, 2019). More research is needed to explore the uniqueness of voluntary or extracurricular exchange programmes, particularly on learning outcomes. Voluntary "clubs" is one way that virtual exchange can be introduced to large classrooms, where there is not enough time or resources to make the exchange a formal part of the module.

Limitations

There are limitations to the current study that need to be addressed. The first limitation concerns the limited number of virtual exchange interactions that took place between the students at the two universities. Due to a difference in semester calendars and national holidays, we were not able to schedule as many sessions as we would have liked. Additionally, the interactions that occurred in the virtual exchange sessions were in group format. Future exchange programmes would benefit from an increased number of interactions as well as individual or small group interactions.

A second limitation, likely resulting from the first, is the lack of critical discussion between the two student groups. In-depth understanding between cultural groups in virtual exchange can only happen if difficult discussions take place (O'Dowd, 2019). When conversations remain about "safe" topics (such as food, student life, sports, etc.), exchange partners may give the false impression of similarity (Kramsch, 2014). Kramsch (2014) calls this phenomenon "diversity surfing", as one only touches on the surface of another's culture. Future collaborations need to tackle difficult issues, such as history, race, and politics, to provide more profound learning experiences and to develop intercultural communication competence during disagreement, not only during "safe" interactions.

The third limitation of the study refers to a possible positivity bias of the findings considering student attendance and participation in the focus group. Of the 29 students who participated in the virtual exchanges, less than half (12 students) took part in at least two of the four sessions. It is possible that the sporadic attendance was the result of the voluntary nature of the programme or the busy schedules of the students but could also be an indication of students losing interest after one or two sessions. Likewise, the small number of volunteers for the focus group could be attributed to similar reasons. Thus, it is possible that the students who participated in the focus groups were the ones who enjoyed the sessions and thus the negative views of other students may not be represented.

While virtual exchange programmes cannot offer all experiences of study abroad programmes, they can provide some of the most important aspects, such as knowledge of other cultures and learning to adapt to cultural differences. As Titarenko and Little (2017) state, "'IaH' provides one viable alternative (but not a substitute) to traditional study abroad" (pg. 125). For the majority of students, particularly those from developing countries, virtual exchange is the closest experience they will have with international cultures. Institutions of higher education would greatly benefit from

developing virtual exchange programmes, not only for the personal development of students, but also for the professional development of future employees in the globalized workspace.

References

Abrahamse, A., Johnson, M., Levinson, N., Medsker, L., Pearce, J. M., Quiroga, C. & Scipione, R. 2014. A virtual educational exchange: A North–South virtually shared class on sustainable development. *Journal of Studies in International Education.* 19**:** 140-159.

Beelen, J. & Jones, E. 2015. Redefining internationalization at home. *In:* Curaj, A., Matei, L., Pricopie, R., Salmi, J. & Scott, P. (eds.) *The European Higher Education Area: Between Critical Reflections and Future Policies.* Heidelberg: Springer.

Belz, J. A. 2005. Intercultural questioning, discovery and tension in internet-mediated language learning partnerships. *Language and Intercultural Communication.* 5**:** 3-39.

Boateng, A. & Thompson, A. M. 2013. Study abroad Ghana: An international experiential learning. *Journal of Social Work Education.* 49**:** 701-715.

Braithwaite, C. A. 2017. Communication in the classroom: An observational analysis comparing Turkish & US American college students. *Global Media Journal TR Edition.* 8(15)**:** 1-10.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology.* 3**:** 77-101.

Brooks, C. F. & Pitts, M. J. 2016. Communication and identity management in a globally-connected classroom: An online international and intercultural learning experience. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication.* 9**:** 52-68.

Carney, N. 2006. Telecollaboration for intercultural learning: An overview of projects involving Japan. *The JALT CALL Journal.* 2**:** 37-52.

Chia, R. C., Poe, E. & Singh, P. 2008. An interactive virtual global cultural course: Building a real time cost effective global collaborative learning environment. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET).* 3**:** 32-35.

Chia, R. C., Poe, E. & Wuensch, K. L. 2009. Attitude change after taking a virtual global understanding course. *International Journal of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences.* 3**:** 1350-1354.

Council of Higher Education (CHE). 2021. VitalStats: Public Higher Education 2019. Pretoria, South Africa.

Crowther, P., Joris, M., Otten, M., Nilsson, B., Teekens, H. & Wächter, B. 2001. *Internationalisation at home: A position paper,* Amsterdam, EAIE. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.univ-catholille.fr/sites/default/files/Internationalisation-at-Home-A-Position-Paper.pdf.

Cunningham, D. J. 2019. Telecollaboration for content and language learning: A genre-based approach. *Language Learning & Technology.* 23**:** 161-177.

Earnest, D. R., Rosenbusch, K., Wallace-Williams, D. & Keim, A. C. 2016. Study abroad in psychology: Increasing cultural competencies through experiential learning. *Teaching of Psychology.* 43**:** 75-79.

Fedderholdt, K. 2001. An email exchange project between non-native speakers of English. *ELT Journal.* 55**:** 273-280.

Garcés, P. & O'Dowd, R. 2021. Upscaling virtual exchange in university education: Moving from innovative classroom practice to regional governmental policy. *Journal of Studies in International Education.* 25**:** 283-300.

Karpova, E., Correia, A. & Baran, E. 2009. Learn to use and use to learn: Technology in virtual collaboration experience. *Internet and Higher Education.* 12**:** 45-52.

Kolb, D. 1984. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall.

Kramsch, C. 2014. Teaching foreign languages in an era of globalization. *Modern Language Journal.* 98**:** 296-311.

Lee, J. & Song, J. 2019. Developing intercultural competence through study abroad, telecollaboration, and on-campus language study. *Language Learning & Technology.* 23**:** 178-198.

Levine, K. J. & Garland, M. E. 2015. Summer study-abroad program as experiential learning: Examining similarities and differences in international communication. *Journal of International Students.* 5: 175-187.

Lewental, M. & Kress, M. E. Making global connections: The virtual classroom project. ASCUE Conference, June 12-16 2005 Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. 184-189.

Lewis, T. & O'Dowd, R. 2016. Online intercultural exchange and foreign language learning: A systematic review. *In:* O'Dowd, R. & Lewis, T. (eds.) *Online Intercultural Exchange: Policy, Pedagogy, Practice.* London: Routledge.

Nava-Aguirre, K. M., Garcia-Portillo, B. I. & Lopez-Morales, J. S. 2019. Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL): An innovative strategy for experiential learning and Internationalization at Home. *In:* Gonzalez-Perez, M. A., Lynden, K. & Taras, V. (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Learning and Teaching International Business and Management.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

O'Dowd, R. 2018. From telecollaboration to virtual exchange: state-of-the-art and the role of UNICollaboration in moving forward. *Journal of Virtual Exchange.* 1**:** 1-23.

O'Dowd, R. 2019. A transnational model of virtual exchange for global citizenship education. *Language Teaching* **53(4):** 1-14.

O'Dowd, R. & Dooly, M. 2020. Intercultural communicative competence development through telecollaboration and virtual exchange. In Jackson, J. (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication.* Second Edition. London: Routledge.

O'Dowd, R. & Lewis, T. 2016. *Online Intercultural Exchange: Policy, Pedagogy, Practice.* London: Routledge.

Pfingsthorn, J., Kramer, C., Czura, A. & Stefl, M. 2019. The formation of professional identity and motivation to engage in telecollaboration in foreign language education. *European Journal of Language Policy.* 11**:** 143-165.

Rossini, M. O., Rincón, S. & Rutkowski, A. 2015. The Link Class Project: Collaborative virtual teams between Peru and the Netherlands. *Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Science.* 20**:** 137-140.

Shenton, A. K. 2004. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information.* 22**:** 63-75.

Titarenko, L. & Little, C. B. 2017. International cross-cultural online learning and teaching: Effective tools and approaches. *American Journal of Distance Learning.* 31**:** 112-127.

Torii-Williams, E. 2004. Incorporating the use of e-mail into a language program. *Computer Assisted Language Learning.* 17**:** 109-122.

Unesco. 2022. *UIS Statistics* [Online]. Available: data.uis.unesco.org [Accessed 28 November 2022].

Wilson, J., Brain, R., Brown, E., Gaind, L., Radan, K. & Redmond, J. 2016. Interdisciplinary study abroad as experiential learning. *Comparative and International Education.* 45: 1-17.

Wood, E. A., Collins, S. L., Mueller, S., Stetten, N. E. & El-Shokry, M. 2022. Transforming Perspectives Through Virtual Exchange: A US-Egypt Partnership Part 1. *Frontiers in Public Health.* 10.